

Question: How has a violent right-wing party gained power in the world's largest democracy?

Essay Title: Change of Power in the world largest democracy

Description: IN 2014, world largest democracy saw a shift in ideology at the highest level in government. This is descriptive research that aims to analyse and describe the entire process of how the right-wing party came to power in India. It looks in the multiple factors such as money power, manpower, marketing power and social media power. It looks into each factor and its contribution during election in 2014. It investigates accurately and systemically how multiple factors supported the BJP to come into power.

Keywords: India, 2014, democracy, election, vote, Narendra Modi, Gujarat, BJP, RSS, Muslims, development, win, campaign, power, control, marketing, media.

Introduction

India is a home to 1.3 billion people, of whom 834 million are eligible voters, making it the world's largest democracy. The 2014 election in India resulted in a change of ideological colour of the Lok Sabha (lower house in parliament) from a temperate green to deep saffron. India's most controversial and divisive politician Narendra Modi won the office of Prime Minister. Mr. Modi, the religious extremist, belongs to the right-wing Hindu party called Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Despite controversies and evidence of him being violent and radically hostile especially towards Muslims, the electorate in the world's largest democracy chose him to be Prime Minister. However, what really helped BJP to come into power at the central government has little to do with his involvement in 2002 Gujarat riots or being religious extremist but a lot to do with the way election campaign was carried out. This essay argues that Narendra Modi won the

2014 election in the world's largest democracy by strategic campaigning and excessive marketing.

History and Background

Narendra Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2002 to 2014 and is a former cadre member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Price, 2015). Modi is known for his radical hostility toward Muslims. 2002 Gujarat riots between Hindu and Muslim were state-sponsored violence. (Jaffrelot, 2003). When former BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee lost the general election in 2004, he told a TV interviewer, 'The impact of the Gujarat riots was felt nationwide. This was unexpected and hurt us badly. Modi should have been removed after the incident.' (Price, 2015). Narendra Modi was denied US visa for being religious extremist due to 2002 riots incident. Modi was nationally as well as internationally surrounded by controversies of 2002 Gujarat riots.

The RSS had a greater impact than anything else on the character of the man. Ramchandra Guha (Guha, 2016) states that, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) describes itself as a cultural organization, but it is intensely ideological and deeply political, and Its ultimate goal is to construct a Hindu Nation. RSS was declared a religious extremist group and was banned several times in India. (Hansen, 1999). Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is built on the political wing of RSS. BJP's electoral vote crucially remained dependent on communal violence and polarization

(Hansen, 1999). The two famous incidents were the Babri Masjid incident of 1992 and 2002 Gujarat riots.

The Babri Masjid incident in Ayodhya according to the BJP is the biggest mass movement since independence to reaffirm the nation's cultural identity (Jeffrelot, 2007). "The final layer in Babri Masjid agitation was the discourse on the danger and demonic character of the Muslim other, both as a geographical other (Pakistan and the Muslim world), and an internal other, the India Muslims with extraterritorial loyalties" (Hansen, 1999). It was after the Babri Masjid incident that BJP won 88 seats and came to power in the Central Government (Jeffrelot, 2007). Looking at history and violence incidents of BJP, it can be said that they have consistently used communal divide in Indian politics to gain votes and power. Vote cast by the BJP reflects deep cultural logics and the language of caste and community which is deeply immersed in Indian culture (Hansen, 1999). "Thomas Hansen argues that the 'Saffron Wave' was made possible because of the emergence of "majoritarian democracy", a new form of "populist governmentality" (Hansen, 1999).

Gujarat Model

Gujarat Model of development played a vital role in promoting Narendra Modi from being a provincial leader to one being a national leader. Modi is credited with enabling Gujarat's economic progress and development. Gujarat's GDP was growing at an average 10.1% per year during Modi tenure which outstripped India's GDP which was 7.7% in the same period

(Economist, 2011). However, it is less known to people that Gujarat has been the leader in GDP since early 1990s. There is no evidence that Modi did something miraculous to Gujarat growth (Ghatak, 2017). According to Ashok Sharma (Sreedharan, 2015), the foundational reason for Modi's success was focus on development addenda.

Gujarat model ranks in top 5 in growth indicators like net state domestic product but state ranking on social development indicators like poverty, sex-ratio, infant mortality Gujarat ranking is poor (India, 2017). Raghuram Rajan's committee report on backwardness of states determined on composite performance of index which gives equal importance to education, health, etc places Gujarat at 14th out of 28th states (Committee, 2013). Gujarat, one of the most economically prosperous states of India, appears in the list as a 'less developed' state when it comes to social indicators. To note that the so-called Gujarat Model is simply absent in the provincial election of Gujarat itself.

However, politics is not driven by economic fundamentals alone and there are other factors which have their role to play.

Uttar Pradesh

UP is not just one of India's economic powerhouses. Eight out of fourteen Indian prime ministers before Modi belonged to UP but they had made comparatively little material progress (Price, 2015). In India, any party needs to win 272 plus seats to form a government. Uttar Pradesh is the

highest populated state in India and is always crucial to any party during elections as it holds 80 seats. BJP swept the largest state of India, Uttar Pradesh, by winning 71 out of 80 seats. (Misra, 2014). Hence, Uttar Pradesh alone gave 25% of seats BJP needed to form the government. It was a historical win for any party to win so many seats in Uttar Pradesh. There are various cards that Modi played to win the votes in Uttar Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh is one of the poorest states in India and a lot of people migrated to other states for better jobs. Many of these economic migrants went to Gujarat and came home with stories of better roads, 24-hour electricity and chance to earn a decent living. Modi spoke of development and said his record in Gujarat proved he could deliver. He talked about the Gujarat model and the first-hand testimony of people who had been there and seen it for themselves made it more than just an election rhetoric (Price, 2015). So, this appealed to some of the poorest apart from young voters and business communities.

OBC (other backward classes) makeup over 40% of the population of UP and Modi himself is an OBC. The Dalit comprise of another 21%. (Price, 2015). People had sense of belonging because of his caste and caste support in Uttar Pradesh and whole of India still plays a significant role.

The upper caste where BJP support was traditionally strongest are around 19% (Price, 2015). Hence, to gain votes from the upper caste was never

an issue. Muslim who falls outside Hindu caste system, account for 18.5%. And it is Uttar Pradesh where communal violence of 1992 Babri Masjid took place between Hindu and Muslim. So, it was hard to gain votes from Muslims. In fact, Amit Shah the current president of BJP was banned for making any public speeches or conducting rallies by the Election Commission for hate speech he made in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh (Reddy, 2014). It was caste politics, Gujarat model and marketing (free bees) that helped him get votes in UP.

First-time Voters

Modi benefited from the demography of India. According to the 2011 census, there were about 120.53 million first time voters out of 833.06 in the 2014 election. These first-time electors accounted for about 14.47 percent (Misra, 2014). It also accounted for the fact that Gujarat Riots could not play any significant role in determining the direction in which the first-time electors polled as they would be too young, around six to ten years old in 2002 when the riots happened (Misra, 2014). History of BJP mattered little to first time young voters, and they can be won by aggressive campaigns with a development agenda.

Modi image and leadership

Indians have always been obsessed with strong leaders, be it Indira Gandhi or Narendra Modi. Lance Price, (Price, 2015) argues that the country was crying out for leadership, so the campaign was on 'Vote Modi', rather than 'Vote BJP'. Never before has so much trust, whether

from the low party worker, the successful business executive, or the idealist first time voter, been placed in one man. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had given author Lance Price unprecedented access to help analyse the campaign that brought Modi to power. When the author meets Narendra Modi in person he says, “He completely dominates the room. His eyes are sharp and penetrating and I found it very hard to look away from him while making notes or checking something. Modi is physically commanding also. The way he dressed, the way he spoke, the way he walked. His body language was that of a leader, and he looked like a giant.” He has always carried an image of a tough guy.

By positioning himself as a decisive leader capable of taking tough decisions that would miraculously rid India of its myriad of problems, Modi managed to capture the imagination of the Indian youth and the middle class like no leader in the recent past (Misra, 2014). In fact, the RSS top brass were his strongest supporters, convinced that only he could lead the BJP to victory (Price, 2015). At the same time, the campaign projected Modi as a better administrator and economic performer than the inexperienced Rahul Gandhi (Sreedharan, 2015).

Image of Modi as a perfect leader was already excited within the party and RSS, all party had to do was to create the same image to millions of voters through a campaign to make Modi prime minister and they were successful in doing so. Lance Price (Price, 2015), states in his book that Modi’s rise to power is deeply troubling to many Indians, especially the

country's 138 million Muslims and its many other minorities. Which shows that it is not just Muslims in Gujarat now but Muslims in the whole of India that fears Modi. The fear among Muslims is directly related to communal divided and rise of Hindutva.

Organizing

One of the most crucial points that led him to victory was the way he and his team organized and managed the entire campaign. Officially the BJP is independent of the RSS, and open to all Indians, but the importance of the Sangh's vast network of members cannot be overestimated. Although RSS doesn't publish figures and there is no formal registration process, estimates of its membership range from two to six million people. Even at the lowest end, that makes it the second largest political movement in the world after the Chinese communist party. It provided many thousands of the foot soldiers who worked tirelessly at the grassroot level to secure the election of Modi and his government (Price, 2015). Modi had tremendous human recourse which provided huge power and capabilities in all different directions for the campaign and election. No other political party in India has as many members as BJP and RSS together have. This not only gives the party immense strength but also a unique advantage.

Modi recruited people such as Dr.Hiren Joshi, an electronic engineer turned academic, and Prashant Kishor, a formal public health expert with the United Nations. Dr.Nirav Shah, a dentist and Yash Gandhi was a student (Price, 2015). Modi recruited people from extremely diverse

backgrounds which were spread globally. And it is not surprising why it received support from NRI who lived abroad.

Modi used aggressive corporate-style campaigns and created a cult of personality around him. The Modi government also came up with 272+ mobile apps. It was a platform where supporters of BJP could register and become volunteers and connect with BJP leaders, offer advice and suggestions, and organize activities at the local level. Through 272+ apps and Facebook supporters could choose to engage in activities such as translating candidate Narendra Modi's speeches into different languages, coming up with catchy slogans, and encouraging others in their online and offline networks to circulate political jokes. Those volunteers who signed up can also participate in door-to-door campaigning and engage in various types of neighbourhood outreach (Guha, 2016). BJP was not only engaging with ordinary citizens in their campaign but also these citizens started working for BJP in a way. This is unique for any democracy that ordinary citizens can campaign for the party.

The 272+ app also collected electoral roll numbers (voter ID) and party created databases which helped BJP identify specific polling booths where voters were registered and inform the local BJP unit. (Guha, 2016). So, on the day of election BJP could make sure that particular candidate has cast the vote. It must be noted how far BJP have gone to secure the vote. Also, collecting citizens' voter ID is much beyond campaigning and makes one question about the legal and ethical aspect of winning the election.

Many of Narendra Modi's speeches as well as the BJP's election manifesto were crowdsourced. They also emphasized that issues that Modi addressed in his campaign rallies and speeches were often based on comments and suggestions obtained from the public through online forums and via Twitter (Guha, 2016).

A leader of BJP social media cell said they try to identify the volunteers on social media based on how active they are, what they are posting and then party messages them. She also said that they look for people who supported Narendra Modi and his politics, expressed pro-Hindu and nationalist sentiments, and who had a wide network to whom they can send out party messages. (Guha, 2016). BJP strategically entered people's social media where they are going to be active and spend more time which created greater impact in people's mind. Rajeeka Kacheeria of the BJP's IT cell said: "Entire social network perception is micromanaged. Everything that happens on the Internet and social media is done under the guidance of Mr. Narendra Modi." (Chopra, 2014)

According to Chopra (Chopra, 2014), "hundreds of small cells" made up largely of young men, many of them employed in the technology/software industries, who support the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi, has "mushroomed" all over India. As she puts it, "You can call them Internet or cyber Hindus. Their daily agenda is to pick the news, put up pictures and articles that criticize the ruling Congress

party and praise Modi or the BJP. They are the online crusaders who actively counter anti-Modi coverage.” (p. 56)

Apart from carefully recruiting “volunteers” who conformed to a certain archetype, they could be differentiated from ordinary supporters who participated on the 272+ platform. The BJP also provided them with extensive training and ensured that they operated within the framework provided by the party. Party offered a vast corpus of ready-made material focusing on a range of topics on a password-protected section of its website. And it was from this centrally controlled and maintained repository that most volunteers obtained the bulk of the material that they posted and circulated on various social media platforms (Guha, 2016). Both supporters and party leaders agreed that volunteers were strongly “discouraged” from posting controversial articles or engaging in debates with those who were opposed to the BJP, its leader, or the cultural beliefs (Guha, 2016).

One of the BJP volunteers said that “teams worked like sleeper cells—inactive on the political scene but ready to strike when the ordered, and the marching orders came just a few months before the elections” (Guha, 2016). The word ‘sleeper cells’ is very familiar with terrorism. It sounds like organized crime.

Other social media volunteers from the BJP underscored the fact that the party tried to maintain a 24-hour cycle of voter and media engagement by

taking advantage of the fact that their volunteers were often located in different time zones, such as the United States (Guha, 2016). It presupposes not just the psychology of the voter, which is how political advertising works, but also remotely controls the limits of voter information—what issues are meant to mean and not mean in the public domain, their selection, interpretation, and their shelf life. The success of such a media strategy lies in its successful agenda-setting and priming of the public mind and thought (Sreedharan, 2015).

People came from all walks of life to support Modi. College students and software executives used weekends to work for Modi and many of them said it is a feel-good factor in contributing to society for the need of new leadership. Smita Barooah is a mother of two children and is professional photographer left home in Singapore and came for campaigning from January to May 2014 (Chopra, 2014).

Modi took complete advantage of the Indians specially Gujarati community which is widespread in US, UK, Africa, and other parts of the world. He realised getting overseas Indians hooked in his media and funding strategies could help him win the election (Chopra, 2014).

Saima Saeed argues that such fast and furious media campaigns tend to browbeat the voter by romanticising candidates who use the media to buy favourable public opinion. The news content has witnessed a growing sensationalism, trivialisation and “entertainmentalization” (Saeed, 2013),

none of which support the kind of deliberative electoral process that a democracy as plural as India would need.

Patna was bombed just before Modi had to deliver his speech in one of the rallies. Despite the bombing over a million people had assembled (Price, 2015). People risked their lives to hear Modi, which is so crazy. Crowd was so much attracted that they didn't even care for their life. This shows the madness that people had for Modi.

Role of Internet, Media and technology

I would argue that the media played a vital role in the 2014 general election in India. This section of my essay will talk about how the "Modi Wave" was essentially created by the media. The media played an active role of an interested party instead of an objective observer and a mere facilitator, establishing the embeddedness of media in contemporary politics (Sreedharan, 2015). The newspaper, magazines, television, radio, outdoor hoardings and of course the web, each and every form of possible communication were used at extreme level not just to reach the general public but also to influence them to a larger extent. The famous slogans '*Achche Din Aane Wale hain*' (Good days are coming) and '*Abki Baar, Modi Sarkar*' (This time Modi government) reached every household in India (Sreedharan, 2015). This created Modi hype. Media not only influences people's perspective, but it also blocks rational thinking. A lot of people casted their vote under the influence of '*Modi Wave*'.

Prof. Zoya Hasan from Jawaharlal Nehru University said, 'I think media and money played a very role, an exceptionally important role in this election. It is certainly about ownership because ours is corporate controlled media. Some of the biggest newspaper and television sectors are owned by the corporate sector. And Modi has been assiduously courting the corporate sector.' (Price, 2015). For instance, one media group, Network 18, the holding company for news channels including CNN-IBN, has undergone a "rightward shift" following its takeover by the Reliance Group. All television channels, magazines and the online paper owned by the group are learnt to have been instructed to carry material promoting Modi; voices of protest are learnt to have been stifled or silenced (Raman, 2014). Media houses failed to create a fair and healthy environment for debate and discussion which is necessary for democratic country like India.

Modi received more coverage than Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi (Lab, 2014). This shows coverage favoured Mr.Modi and so more eyeballs towards Modi compared to other leaders.

The same CMS research also revealed that politicians received more airtime than election issues. It was a more personality centric election. The maximum coverage was on personality (38.24%) whereas issues such as development (2.23%), governance (2.12%) and public policy (2.03%) received minimum coverage (Lab, 2014). It is not just about disproportionate distribution of issues but also the way issues are prioritised. Media has a more responsible role as it influences society to

great extent, but media has failed miserably in its role. It has taken the audience in an unwanted direction and away from the more serious issues.

Mr.Modi was always ahead in technology compared to other politicians. He already had his own state-wide television channel 'NaMo Gujarat' which is initials of his name Narendra Modi when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. It is interesting to note that 'NaMo' in gujarati means 'to bow down'. He has his own YouTube channel, and his Facebook and Twitter account went into overdrive, and he became the first politician in India to target young voters by taking part in Google+ Hangout discussion (Price, 2015). By April 2014, the Facebook page of Narendra Modi had the fastest growing Facebook page of any politician worldwide. Modi's interacted with voters via Google hangouts, where he responded to their questions in a live format that was also streamed live on YouTube and his Google+ page as well as the Chai pe Charcha³ initiative, where questionnaires could gather at designated tea shops to engage in Q&A discussions with Modi through online video hook-ups. They pointed out that many of the questions Modi addressed at these events were in fact identified by supporters who could vote via Facebook polls as to which questions, he should address (Guha, 2016). This example shows Narendra Modi frequently reaching out to ordinary citizens. This personal interaction on a big scale not only increased his popularity but it also impressed common people.

Role and impact of digital technology has been crucial in the 2014 election and there needs to be more laws governing the use of the

internet especially social media sites to keep the election more organic and balanced. Social media giants like Facebook and Twitter have a profit motive. The way BJP has made use of social media sites says there is nothing fundamentally democratic about the internet. A lot of young minds are vulnerable and such a strategically organized campaign can block the mind.

Just before the recent Gujarat election of 2017 filmmaker Rakesh Sharma releases dozens of clips of controversial Modi speeches made just after 2002 riots. Rakesh Sharma claims that Modi's more communal utterances have disappeared online. There has been a whitewash and a public relation (PR) makeover of his image. A part of Modi's image makeover is to remove his communal speeches from online spaces, ones based on which he built up his image in the first place. Some of communal speeches he had made, suddenly you find some of them are no longer available online. And state funds are being used to create an image. It is not about development but the development of Modi's image (Sharma, 2017).

Marketing

Children and adults alike were showered with campaign goodies like flags, t-shirts, and cardboard Modi masks. It is easier to buy votes from the poor section of society by giving campaign goodies. It was no accident that much of it was in party colour, saffron, which carries great religious significance for Hindus. Narendra Modi was promoted on t-shirts like

superman. Security for women was a big issue prompting his supporters to market a NaMo pepper spray. Modi dolls went on sale. The most bizarre publication to have been produced by Modi's supporters during the campaign was a 45-page comic book called Bal Narendra - Childhood stories of Narendra Modi. (Price, 2015). From NaMo tea stalls to NaMo mobile phones, from saree shops to sweet shops and from neck-tags, stickers, caps to sunshades on cars, brand NaMo was to be seen everywhere through the 2014 Campaign (Sreedharan, 2015).

The cost of 3D holograms was over £ 150,000 for a 3D speech. On 12 December a speech delivered from his residence in Gandhinagar was beamed live to fifty-three different locations in twenty-six cities simultaneously, earning him a citation in the Guinness book of world record for 'the most simultaneous broadcast of a Pepper's Ghost Illusion.' (Price, 2015). It is insane to spend so much money on 3D holograms when a country has widespread poverty, but the media never questioned the spending of the party.

The BJP advertising campaign was touted to have cost it a whopping Rs. 5,000 crores (equivalent to INR 50,000 million, approximately GBP 505 million) (Sreedharan, 2015). It is ironic to see a developing country like India which spends such a huge amount on advertising when it has a lot of basic issues to solve. It might be interesting to go into the details of all the sources from where money came in.

Conclusion

If politics was driven by economic fundamentals alone and if economic fundamentals mean collective well-being of the majority of the population then this is not the outcome we should be seeing (Ghatak, 2017). This essay focuses on various issues like Gujarat Model, youth factor, seats in Uttar Pradesh, Modi's image as a strong leader, help of RSS and volunteers, role of social media, strategic planning and organizing, marketing and campaigning. Looking inside the 2014 campaign tells us that Narendra Modi is the great planner and strategist. He effectively and smoothly managed the world's largest election campaign.

The 2014 election shows excessive use of marketing which created a confirmation bias in people's mind for Modi as the leader for India. The image he created during the campaign clout ordinary vulnerable citizens. The Modi Supremacy reached every household in the country and a violent right-wing party came into power in the world's largest democracy.

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